A

DISCOURSE

ON

ANCIENT AND MODERN LEARNING.

BY THE LATE RIGHT HONOURABLE

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A DISCOURSE ON ANCIENT AND MODERN LEARNING.

THE preſent age ſeems to have a very true taſte of polite learning, and perhaps takes the beauties of an ancient author, as much as 'tis poſſible for it at ſo great a diſtance of time. It may therefore be ſome entertainment to us to conſider what pleaſure the cotemporaries and country-men of our old writers found in their works, which we at preſent are not capable of; and whether at the ſame time the moderns may not have ſome advantages peculiar to themſelves, and diſcover ſeveral graces that ariſe merely from the antiquity of an author.

AND here the firſt and moſt general advantage, the ancients had over us, was, that they knew all the ſecret hiſtory of a compoſure: what was the occaſion of ſuch a diſcourſe or poem, whom ſuch a ſentence aim'd at, what perſon lay diſguis'd in ſuch a character: for by

this means they cou'd ſee their author in a variety of lights, and receive ſeveral different entertainments from the ſame paſſage. We, on the contrary, can only pleaſe ourſelves with the wit or good ſenſe of a writer, as it ſtands ſtripp'd of all thoſe accidental circumſtances that at firſt help'd to ſet it off: we have him but in a ſingle view, and only diſcover ſuch eſſential ſtanding beauties as no time or years can poſſibly deface.

I DON'T queſtion but Homer, who in the diverſity of his characters has far excell'd all other heroic poets, had an eye on ſome real perſons who were then living, in moſt of them. The deſcription of Therſites is ſo ſpiteful and particular, that I can't but think it one of his own, or his country's enemies in diſguiſe, as on the contrary his Neſtor looks like the figure of ſome ancient and venerable patriot: an effeminate fop perhaps of thoſe times lies hid in Paris, and a crafty ſtatesman in Ulyſſes: Patroclus may be a compliment on a celebrated friend, and Agamemnon the deſcription of a majeſtic prince. Ajax, Hector, and Achilles are all of them valiant, but in ſo different a manner, as perhaps has characteriſed the different kinds of heroiſm that Homer had obſerved in ſome of his great cotemporaries. Thus far we learn from the poet's life, that he endeavoured to gain favour and patronage by his verſe; and 'tis very probable he thought on this method of ingratiating himſelf with particular perſons, as he has

made the drift of the whole poem a compliment on his country in general.

And to ſhew us, that this is not a bare conjecture only, we are told in the account that is left us of Homer, that he inſerted the very names of ſome of his cotemporaries. Tychius and Mentor in particular are very neatly celebrated in him. The firſt of theſe was an honeſt cobler, who had been very kind and ſerviceable to the poet, and is therefore advanc'd in his poem, to be Ajax's ſhield-maker. The other was a great man in Ithaca, who for his patronage and wiſdom has gain'd a very honourable poſt in the Odyſſey, where he accompanies his great country-man in his travels, and gains ſuch a reputation for his prudence, that Minerva took his ſhape upon her when ſhe made herſelf viſible. Themius was the name of Homer's ſchool-maſter, but the poet has certainly drawn his own character, when he ſets him forth as a favourite of Apollo, that was deprived of his ſight and uſed to ſing the noble exploits of the Grecians.

Virgil too may well be ſuppos'd to give ſeveral hints in his poem, which we are not able to take, and to have lain many bye deſigns and under-plots, which are too remote for us to look into diſtinctly at ſo great a diſtance: but as for the characters of ſuch as liv'd in his own time, I have not ſo much to ſay of him as

Homer. He is indeed very barren in this part of his poem, and has but little varied the manners of the principal perſons in it. His Aeneas is a compound of valour and piety, Achates calls himſelf his friend, but takes no occaſion of ſhewing himſelf ſo; Mneſteus, Sergeſtus, Gyas, and Cloanthus are all of them men of the ſame ſtamp and character.

------'Fortemque Gyan, fortemque Cloanthum.'

Besides, Virgil was ſo very nice and delicate a writer, that probably he might not think his compliment to Auguſtus ſo great, or ſo artfully conceal'd, if he had ſcatter'd his praiſes more promiſcuouſly and made his court to others in the ſame poem. Had he entertained any ſuch deſign, Agrippa muſt in juſtice have challenged the ſecond place, and if Agrippa's repreſentative had been admitted, Aeneas wou'd have had very little to do; which wou'd not have redounded much to the honour of his emperor. If therefore Virgil has ſhadow'd any great perſons beſides Auguſtus in his characters, they are to be found only in the meaner actors of his poem, among the diſputers for a petty victory in the fifth book, and perhaps in ſome few other places. I ſhall only mention Iopas the philoſophical muſician at Dido's banquet, where I can't but fancy ſome celebrated maſter complimented, for methinks the epithet Crinitus is ſo wholly foreign to the

purpoſe, that it perfectly points at ſome particular perſon; who perhaps (to purſue a wandring gueſs) was one of the Grecian performers, then in Rome; for beſides that they were the beſt muſicians and philoſophers, the termination of the name belongs to their language, and the epithet is the ſame [Κραηκομόωντες] that Homer gives to his country-men in general.

Now that we may have a right notion of the pleaſure we have loſt on this account, let us only conſider the different entertainment we of the preſent age meet with, in Mr. Dryden's Abſalom and Achitophel, from what an Engliſh reader will find a hundred years hence, when the figures of the perſons concern'd are not ſo lively and freſh in the minds of poſterity. Nothing can be more delightful than to ſee two characters facing each other all along and running parallel through the whole piece, to compare feature with feature, to find out the nice reſemblance in every touch, and to ſee where the copy fails and where it comes up to the original. The reader cannot but be pleas'd to have an acquaintance thus riſing by degrees in his imagination, for whilſt the mind is buſy in applying every particular, and adjuſting the ſeveral parts of the deſcription, it is not a little delighted with its diſcoveries and feels ſomething like the ſatisfaction of an author from his own compoſure.

WHAT is here ſaid of Homer and Virgil holds very ſtrong in the ancient ſatiriſts and authors of dialogues, but eſpecially of comedies. What cou'd we have made of Ariſtophanes's Clouds, had he not told us on whom the ridicule turn'd; and we have good reaſon to believe we ſhould have reliſh'd it more than we do, had we known the deſign of each character and the ſecret intimations in every line. Hiſtories themſelves often come down to us defective on this account, where the writers are not full enough to give us a perfect notion of occurrences; for the tradition, which at firſt was a comment on the ſtory, is now quite loſt, and the writing only preſerv'd for the information of poſterity.

I MIGHT be very tedious on this head, but I ſhall only mention another author who, I believe, received no ſmall advantage from this conſideration, and that is Theophraſtus, who probably has ſhown us ſeveral of his cotemporaries in the repreſentation of his paſſions and vices; for we may obſerve in moſt of his characters ſomething foreign to his ſubject, and ſome other folly or infirmity mixing itſelf with the principal argument of his diſcourſe. His eye ſeems to have been ſo attentively fix'd on the perſon in whom the vanity reign'd, that other circumſtances of his behaviour beſides thoſe he was to deſcribe inſinuated themſelves unawares, and crept inſenſibly into the character. It was hard for him to extract a ſingle folly out of the

whole maſs without leaving a little mixture in the ſeparation: ſo that his particular vice appears ſomething diſcolour'd in the deſcription, and his diſcourſe, like a glaſs ſet to catch the image of any ſingle object, gives us a lively reſemblance of what we look for; but at the ſame time returns a little ſhadowy landskip of the parts that lie about it.

And, as the ancients enjoyed no ſmall privilege above us, in knowing the perſons hinted at in ſeveral of their authors; ſo they receiv'd a great advantage, in ſeeing often the pictures and images that are frequently deſcribed in many of their poets. When Phidias had carved out his Jupiter, and the ſpectators ſtood aſtoniſh'd at ſo awful and majeſtic a figure, he ſurprized them more, by telling them it was a copy: and, to make his words true, ſhew'd them the original, in that magnificent deſcription of Jupiter, towards the latter end of the firſt Iliad. The comparing both together probably diſcover'd ſecret graces in each of 'em, and gave new beauty to their performances: thus in Virgil's firſt Aeneid, where we ſee the repreſentation of rage bound up, and chain'd in the temple of Janus:

——— 'Furor impius intus
'Saeva ſedens ſuper arma, et centum vinctus aheneis
'Poſt tergum nodis, fremit horridus ore cruento.'

THO' we are much pleas'd with ſo wonderful a deſcription, how muſt the pleaſure double on thoſe who cou'd compare the poet and the ſtatuary together, and ſee which had put moſt horror and diſtraction into his figure. But we, who live in theſe lower ages of the world, are ſuch entire ſtrangers to this kind of diverſion, that we often miſtake the deſcription of a picture for an allegory, and don't ſo much as know when it is hinted at. Juvenal tells us, a flatterer will not ſtick to compare a weak pair of ſhoulders to thoſe of Hercules, when he lifts up Antaeus from the earth. Now what a forc'd, unnatural ſimilitude does this ſeem, amidſt the deep ſilence of ſcholiaſts and commentators? but how full of life and humour, if we may ſuppoſe it alluded to ſome remarkable ſtatue of theſe two champions, that perhaps ſtood in a public place of the city? there is now in Rome a very ancient ſtatue entangled in a couple of marble ſerpents, and ſo exactly cut in Laocoon's poſture and circumſtances, that we may be ſure Virgil drew after the ſtatuary, or the ſtatuary after Virgil: and if the poet was the copyer, we may be ſure it was no ſmall pleaſure to a Roman, that cou'd ſee ſo celebrated an image out-done in the deſcription.

I MIGHT here expatiate largely on ſeveral cuſtoms that are now forgotten, tho' often intimated by ancient authors; and particularly, on many expreſſions of their cotemporary poets, which they had an eye upon in their

reflections, tho' we at preſent know nothing of the buſineſs. Thus Ovid begins the ſecond book of his elegies, with theſe two lines:

'Haec quoque ſcribebam Pelignis natus aquoſis,
'Ille ego nequitiae Naſo poeta meae.'

How far theſe may prove the four verſes prefix'd to Virgil's Aeneid genuine, I ſhall not pretend to determine: but I dare ſay Ovid in this place hints at 'em if they are ſo, and I believe every reader will agree that the humour of theſe lines wou'd be very much heightened by ſuch an alluſion, if we ſuppoſe a love-adventure uſher'd in with an *ille ego*, and taking its riſe from ſomething like a preface to the Aeneid. Gueſſes might be numberleſs on this occaſion, and tho' ſometimes they may be grounded falſly, yet they often give a new pleaſure to the reader and throw in abundance of light on the more intricate and obſcure paſſages of an ancient author.

But there is nothing we want more direction in at preſent than the writings of ſuch ancient authors as abound with humour, eſpecially where the humour runs in a kind of cant and a particular ſet of phraſes. We may indeed in many places, by the help of a good ſcholiaſt and ſkill in the cuſtoms and language of a country know that ſuch phraſes are humorous and

ſuch a metaphor drawn from a ridiculous cuſtom; but at the ſame time the ridicule flags, and the mirth languiſhes to a modern reader, who is not ſo converſant and familiar with the words and ideas that lie before him; ſo that the ſpirit of the jeſt is quite pall'd and deaden'd, and the briſkneſs of an expreſſion loſt to an ear that is ſo little accuſtomed to it. This want of diſcerning between the comical and ſerious ſtile of the ancients, has run our modern editors and commentators into a ſenſeleſs affectation of Terence's and Plautus's phraſes, when they deſire to appear pure and claſſical in their language; ſo that you often ſee the grave pedant making a buffoon of himſelf, where he leaſt deſigns it, and running into light and trifling phraſes, where he wou'd fain appear ſolemn and judicious.

ANOTHER great pleaſure the ancients had beyond us, if we conſider them as the poet's countrymen, was, that they liv'd as it were upon the ſpot, and within the verge of the poem; their habitations lay among the ſcenes of the Aeneid; they cou'd find out their own country in Homer, and had every day perhaps in their ſight the mountain or field where ſuch an adventure happen'd, or ſuch a battle was fought. Many of them had often walk'd on the banks of Helicon, or the ſides of Parnaſſus, and knew all the private haunts and retirements of the muſes: ſo that they liv'd as it were on fairy ground, and convers'd in an enchanted region,

where every thing they look'd upon appear'd romantic, and gave a thouſand pleaſing hints to their imaginations. To conſider Virgil only in this reſpect: how muſt a Roman have been pleas'd, that was well acquainted with the capes and promontories, to ſee the original of their names as they ſtand derived from Miſenus, Palinurus, and Cajeta? that cou'd follow the poet's motions, and attend his hero in all his marches from place to place? that was very well acquainted with the lake Amſanctus, where the fury ſunk, and cou'd lead you to the mouth of the cave where Aeneas took his deſcent for hell? their being converſant with the place, where the poem was tranſacted, gave them a greater reliſh than we can have at preſent of ſeveral parts of it; as it affected their imaginations more ſtrongly, and diffus'd through the whole narration a greater air of truth. The places ſtood as ſo many marks and teſtimonies to the veracity of the ſtory that was told of them, and help'd the reader to impoſe upon himſelf in the credibility of the relation. To conſider only that paſſage in the 8th Aeneid, where the poet brings his hero acquainted with Evander, and gives him a proſpect of that circuit of ground, which was afterwards cover'd with the metropolis of the world. The ſtory of Cacus, which he there gives us at large, was probably raiſed on ſome old confus'd tradition of the place, and if ſo, was doubly entertaining to a Roman, when he ſaw it work'd up into ſo noble a piece of poetry, as it wou'd

have pleas'd an Engliſhman, to have ſeen in prince Arthur any of the old traditions of Guy varied and beautified in an Epiſode, had the chronology ſuffered the author to have led his hero into Warwickſhire on that occaſion. The map of the place, which was afterwards the ſeat of Rome, muſt have been wonderfully pleaſing to one that lived upon it afterwards, and ſaw all the alterations that happen'd in ſuch a compaſs of ground: two paſſages in it are inimitably fine, which I ſhall here tranſcribe, and leave the reader to judge what impreſſions they made on the imagination of a Roman, who had every day before his eyes the Capitol and the Forum.

'Hinc ad Tarpeiam ſedem et Capitolia ducit
'Aurea nunc, olim ſilveſtribus horrida dumis.
'Jam tum Religio pavidos terrebat agreſtes
'Dira loci, jam tum ſilvam ſaxumque tremebant.
'Hoc nemus, hunc, inquit, frondoſa vertice collem,
'Quis Deus, incertum eſt, habitat Deus. Arcades
'ipſum
'Credunt ſe vidiſſe Jovem: cum ſaepe nigrantem
'Aegida concuteret dextrâ, nimboſque cieret.
And afterwards,-----ad tecta ſubibant
'Pauperis Evandri, paſſimque armenta videbant
'Romanoque foro et lautis mugire carinis.'

THERE is another engaging circumſtance that made

Virgil and Homer more particularly charming to their own country-men, than they can poſſibly appear to any of the moderns; and this they took hold of by chooſing their heroes out of their own nation: for by this means they have humour'd and delighted the vanity of a Grecian or Roman reader, they have powerfully engaged him on the hero's ſide, and made him, as it were, a party in every action; ſo that the narration renders him more intent, the happy events raiſe a greater pleaſure in him, the paſſionate part more moves him, and in a word the whole poem comes more home, and touches him more nearly, than it would have done, had the ſcene lain in another country, and a foreigner been the ſubject of it. No doubt but the inhabitants of Ithaca preferr'd the Odyſſey to the Iliad, as the Myrmidons, on the contrary, were not a little proud of their Achilles. The men of Pylos probably could repeat word for word the wiſe ſentences of Neſtor; and we may well ſuppoſe Agamemnon's country-men often pleas'd themſelves, with their prince's ſuperiority in the Greek confederacy. I believe therefore, no Engliſhman reads Homer, or Virgil, with ſuch an inward triumph of thought, and ſuch a paſſion of glory, as thoſe who ſaw in them the exploits of their own country-men or anceſtors. And here by the way, our Milton has been more univerſally engaging in the choice of his perſons, than any other poet can poſſibly be. He has obliged all mankind, and related the whole ſpecies

to the two chief actors in his poem. Nay, what is infinitely more conſiderable, we behold in him, not only our anceſtors, but our repreſentatives. We are really engaged in their adventures, and have a perſonal intereſt in their good, or ill ſucceſs. We are not only their off-ſpring, but ſharers in their fortunes; and no leſs than our own eternal happineſs, or miſery, depends on their ſingle conduct: ſo that ev'ry reader will here find himſelf concern'd, and have all his attention and ſolicitude rais'd in every turn and circumſtance of the whole poem.

If the ancients took a greater pleaſure in the reading of their poets than the moderns can, their pleaſure ſtill roſe higher in the peruſal of their orators; tho' this I muſt confeſs proceeded not ſo much from their precedence to us in reſpect of time, as judgment. Every city among them ſwarm'd with rhetoricians, and every ſenate-houſe was almoſt filled with orators; ſo that they were perfectly well vers'd in all the rules of rhetoric, and perhaps knew ſeveral ſecrets in the art that let them into ſuch beauties of Demoſthenes, or Cicero, as are not yet diſcovered by a modern reader. And this I take to have been the chief reaſon of that wonderful efficacy we find aſcrib'd to the ancient oratory, from what we meet with in the preſent; for, in all arts, every man is moſt mov'd with the perfection of them, as he underſtands them beſt. Now the rulers of

Greece and Rome had generally ſo well accompliſh'd themſelves in the politer parts of learning, that they had a high reliſh of a noble expreſſion, were tranſported with a well-turn'd period, and not a little pleas'd to ſee a reaſon urged in its full force. They knew how proper ſuch a paſſage was to affect the mind, and by admiring it, inſenſibly begot in themſelves ſuch a motion as the orator deſir'd. The paſſion aroſe in 'em unawares, from their conſidering the aptneſs of ſuch words to raiſe it. Accordingly, we find the force of Tully's eloquence ſhew'd itſelf moſt on Caeſar, who probably underſtood it beſt; and Cicero himſelf was ſo affected with Demoſthenes, that 'tis no wonder when he was aſk'd, which he thought the beſt of his orations, he ſhou'd reply, The longeſt. But now the generality of mankind are ſo wholly ignorant of the charms of oratory, that Tully himſelf who guided the lords of the whole earth at his pleaſure, were he now living, and a ſpeaker in a modern aſſembly, wou'd not, with all that divine pomp and heat of eloquence, be able to gain over one man to his party. The vulgar indeed of every age are equally mov'd by falſe ſtrains of rhetoric, but they are not the perſons I am here concern'd to account for.

The laſt circumſtance I ſhall mention, which gave the ancients a greater pleaſure in the reading of their own authors than we are capable of, is that knowledge

they had of the ſound and harmony of their language, which the moderns have at preſent a very imperfect notion of. We find, even in muſic, that different nations have different taſtes of it, and thoſe who moſt agree have ſome particular manner and graces proper to themſelves, that are not ſo agreeable to a foreigner: whether or no it be, that, as the temper of the climates varies, it cauſes an alteration in the animal ſpirits, and the organs of hearing; or as ſuch paſſions reign moſt in ſuch a country, ſo the ſounds are moſt pleaſing that moſt affect thoſe paſſions; or that the ſounds, which the ear has ever been moſt accuſtom'd to, inſenſibly conform the ſecret texture of it to themſelves, and wear in it ſuch paſſages as are beſt fitted for their own reception; or in the laſt place that our national prejudice, and narrowneſs of mind, makes every thing appear odd to us that is new and uncommon: whether any one, or all of theſe reaſons may be look'd upon as the cauſe, we find by certain experience, that what is tuneful in one country, is harſh and ungrateful in another. And if this conſideration holds in muſical ſounds, it does much more in thoſe that are articulate, becauſe there is a greater variety of ſyllables than of notes, and the ear is more accuſtom'd to ſpeech than ſongs. But had we never ſo good an ear, we have ſtill a fault'ring tongue, and a kind of impediment in our ſpeech. Our pronunciation is without doubt very widely different from that of the Greeks and Romans; and our voices, in reſpect of theirs, are

ſo out of tune, that, ſhou'd an ancient hear us, he wou'd think we were reading in another tongue, and ſcarce be able to know his own compoſure, by our repetition of it. We may be ſure, therefore, whatever imaginary notions we may frame to ourſelves, of the harmony of an author, they are very different from the ideas which the author himſelf had of his own performance.

THUS we ſee how time has quite worn out, or decay'd ſeveral beauties of our ancient authors; but to make a little amends for the graces they have loſt, there are ſome few others which they have gather'd from their great age and antiquity in the world. And here we may firſt obſerve, how very few paſſages in their ſtile appear flat and low to a modern reader, or carry in them a mean and vulgar air of expreſſion; which certainly ariſes, in a great meaſure, from the death and diſuſe of the languages in which the ancients compil'd their works. Moſt of the forms of ſpeech, made uſe of in common converſation, are apt to ſink the dignity of a ſerious ſtile, and to take off from the ſolemnity of the compoſition that admits them; nay, thoſe very phraſes, that are in themſelves highly proper and ſignificant, and were at firſt perhaps ſtudy'd and elaborate expreſſions, make but a poor figure in writing, after they are once adopted into common diſcourſe, and ſound over familiar to an ear that is every

where accuſtomed to them. They are too much diſhonour'd by common uſe, and contract a meanneſs, by paſſing ſo frequently through the mouths of the vulgar. For this reaſon, we often meet with ſomething of a baſeneſs in the ſtiles of our beſt Engliſh authors, which we can't be ſo ſenſible of in the Latin and Greek writers; becauſe their language is dead, and no more us'd in our familiar converſations; ſo that they have now laid aſide all their natural homelineſs and ſimplicity, and appear to us in the ſplendor and formality of ſtrangers. We are not intimately enough acquainted with them, and never met with their expreſſions but in print, and that too on a ſerious occaſion; and therefore find nothing of that levity or meanneſs in the ideas they give us, as they might convey into their minds, who uſed them as their mother tongue. To conſider the Latin poets in this light, Ovid, in his Metamorphoſis, and Lucan, in ſeveral parts of him, are not a little beholden to antiquity, for the privilege I have here mention'd, who wou'd appear but very plain men without it; as we may the better find, if we take them out of their numbers, and ſee how naturally they fall into low proſe. Claudian and Statius, on the contrary, whilſt they endeavour too much to deviate from common and vulgar phraſes, clog their verſe with unneceſſary epithets, and ſwell their ſtile with forced unnatural expreſſions, 'till they have blown it up into bombaſt; ſo that their ſenſe has much ado to ſtruggle

through their words. Virgil, and Horace in his odes, have run between theſe two extremes, and made their expreſſions very ſublime, but at the ſame time very natural. This conſideration, therefore, leaſt affects them, for, tho' you take their verſe to pieces, and diſpoſe of their words as you pleaſe, you ſtill find ſuch glorious metaphors, figures, and epithets, as give it too great a majeſty for proſe, and look ſomething like the ruin of a noble pile, where you ſee broken pillars, ſcatter'd obeliſks, maimed ſtatues, and a magnificence in confuſion.

And as we are not much offended with the low idiotiſms of a dead language, ſo neither are we very ſenſible of any familiar words that are uſed in it; as we may more particularly obſerve in the names of perſons and places. We find in our Engliſh writers, how much the proper name of one of our own country-men pulls down the language that ſurrounds it, and familiariſeth a whole ſentence. For our ears are ſo often uſed to it, that we find ſomething vulgar and common in the ſound and cant; but fancy the pomp and ſolemnity of ſtile too much humbled and depreſs'd by it. For this reaſon, the authors of poems and romances, who are not tied up to any particular ſet of proper names, take the liberty of inventing new ones, or at leaſt of chuſing ſuch as are not uſed in their own country; and, by this means, not a little maintain the grandeur and majeſty

of their language. Now the proper names of a Latin or Greek author have the ſame effect upon us as thoſe of a romance, becauſe we meet with them no where elſe but in books. Cato, Pompey, and Marcellus ſound as great in our ears, who have none of their families among us, as Agamemnon, Hector, and Achilles: and therefore, tho' they might flatten an oration of Tully to a Roman reader, they have no ſuch an effect upon an Engliſh one. What I have here ſaid, may perhaps give us the reaſon why Virgil, when he mentions the anceſtors of three noble Roman families, turns Sergius, Memmius, and Cluentius, which might have degraded his verſe too much, into Sergeſtus, Mneſtheus, and Cloanthus, tho' the three firſt wou'd have been as high and ſonorous to us as the other.

But tho' the poets cou'd make thus free with the proper names of perſons, and in that reſpect enjoy'd a privilege beyond the proſe writers; they lay both under an equal obligation, as to the names of places: for there is no poetical geography, rivers are the ſame in proſe and verſe; and the towns and countries of a romance differ nothing from thoſe of a true hiſtory. How oddly therefore muſt the name of a paultry village ſound to thoſe who were well acquainted with the meanneſs of the place; and yet how many ſuch names are to be met with in the catalogues of Homer and Virgil? many of their words muſt therefore very much ſhock the ear of

a Roman or Greek, eſpecially whilſt the poem was new; and appear as meanly to their own country-men, as the duke of Buckingham's Putney Pikes and Chelſea Curiaſeers do to an Engliſhman. But theſe their catalogues have no ſuch diſadvantageous ſounds in them to the ear of a modern, who ſcarce ever hears of the names out of the poet, or knows any thing of the places that belong to them. London may ſound as well to a foreigner, as Troy or Rome; and Iſlington perhaps better than London to them who have no diſtinct ideas ariſing from the names. I have here only mention'd the names of men and places; but we may eaſily carry the obſervation further, to thoſe of ſeveral plants, animals, etc. Thus, where Virgil compares the flight of Mercury to that of a water-fowl, Servius tells us, that he purpoſely omitted the word Mergus, that he might not debaſe his ſtile with it; which, tho' it might have offended the niceneſs of a Roman ear, wou'd have ſounded more tolerably in ours. Scaliger, indeed, ridicules the old ſcholiaſt for his note; becauſe, as he obſerves, the word Mergus is uſed by the ſame poet in his Georgics. But the critic ſhou'd have conſider'd that, in the Georgics, Virgil ſtudied deſcription more than majeſty; and therefore might juſtly admit a low word into that poem, which wou'd have diſgraced his Aeneid; eſpecially, when a god was to be join'd with it in the compariſon.

As antiquity thus conceals what is low and vulg in an author, ſo does it draw a kind of veil over an expreſſion that is ſtrain'd above nature, and recedes to much from the familiar forms of ſpeech. A violen Greciſm, that wou'd ſtartle a Roman at the reading o it, ſounds more natural to us, and is leſs diſtinguiſh able from other parts of the ſtile. An obſolete, or new word that made a ſtrange appearance at firſt t the reader's eye, is now incorporated into the tongue and grown of a piece with the reſt of the language And as for any bold expreſſions in a celebrated ancient we are ſo far from diſliking them, that moſt reader ſingle out only ſuch paſſages as are moſt daring to com- mend; and take it for granted, that the ſtile is beauti- ful and elegant, where they find it hard and unnatural Thus has time mellowed the works of antiquity, by qualifying, if I may ſo ſay, the ſtrength and rawneſs o their colours, and caſting into ſhades the light that was at firſt too violent and glaring for the eye to be- hold with pleaſure.

FINIS.